



LETTERS

A NEW PROPOSAL FOR EUROPEAN SECURITY

Led by Mike Mansfield of Montana, the Senate Democratic Policy Committee recently asked the President to consider a substantial withdrawal of U.S. troops now stationed in Europe (*Washington Post*, September 1). Mansfield indicated that 400,000 to 450,000 men were stationed in Europe under Nato commitments.

This manpower commitment had a plain function as a foundation of the Nato system fifteen years ago when it was first established. At present it is not obvious what purpose it serves except as a hostage of our obligation to Europe. An even weaker campaign than we actually maintain in Vietnam now would convince anyone of our adequate zeal to police the world. What then can we offer to take its place?

One suggested counterpoise, the involvement of West Germany in nuclear arms authority, has been an impediment to a vital world agreement on nonproliferation of nuclear weapons.

Our troops are a particularly expensive manifestation of benevolent concern for European security. They surely represent an annual drain of at least \$5 billion, more than enough to account for recurrent difficulties in our balance of international payments.

There are plenty of projects in scientific research and for the great society that are being starved for the lack of these funds at home. Nor can we be complacent against any needless conscription of human years for even a peacetime army. Is there no cheaper collateral than the half-million troops? In particular, is there some collateral of obviously irreplaceable value whose deposit in Europe would incur smaller operational costs than an army?

Once the question is framed this way, there is one obvious answer: Gold. In place of our large European army we should transfer Fort Knox to a few selected sites on European soil. Will anyone doubt that a serious attack on these assets will evoke an even more vigorous reaction than an involvement of our troops? Certainly the gold drain has been the compulsion for turning off innumerable projects, e.g., in international education, which might be of inestimable importance to world security. It is obvious that we place a supreme value on gold.

American investment in European industry already contributes to the stake. What sinister motive might then have been read into the Johnson Administration's discouragement of this use of U.S. capital?

To make these suggestions is by no means to imply that they be implemented unilaterally, without consultation with our Nato allies or without making full use of them at the bargaining table with the Soviet Union and with France.

Some subtleties are also possible in the details of the way in which our redeployment of Fort Knox might be advertised. Whatever the underlying realities, the overt statement that we are substituting gold for troops might be taken as either too cynical or too jocular. A little imagination can, however, bring up a number of collateral excuses or even substantial reasons for placing the gold on European soil, and it would not be necessary for the Administration to admit in any formal way its function as hostage. As a hostage, however, consideration of the administration of the depository leads to

some interesting speculations. For example, keys might be distributed, as to a multilateral force. Certainly many citizens would prefer risking the loss of our gold to the triggering of global nuclear warfare. Holding a key to a vault with half the world's gold supply should, however, be an amply prestigious substitute for access to the atomic button.

The ideal hostage should of course be the political leadership of the country, that is, move Congress to Berlin; "Wir sind auch Berliner." However, there is an unfortunate ambiguity in the reflex response of the nation should some congressmen rather than others be eradicated. World peace is too important to tolerate such embarrassing doubts. In the end our gold may be our best collateral, and we reach the poetic paradox that the best way to keep our gold is to send it abroad.

These jocular (?) suggestions are provoked by our evident adherence to a series of tragic myths or anachronisms, and the thought that a way might be found for two of them, gold and nuclear hostages, to neutralize one another. In fact, we can do without gold altogether, and our troops in Europe may be functioning less as hostages than as a continued occupation force, still preferable to some of the national initiatives that might succeed their withdrawal. There still remains the chance, at this critical juncture, to find more positive creative methods of demonstrating our commitment to Europe. These need not be novelties and there is nothing new in the most positive suggestion that we redeploy our resources to build a unified culture, for example in a truly universal style of higher education for the United States and Europe. Half a million American students in Europe, and a corresponding cadre of professors and technical experts, and their counterparts here, would represent a far more constructive representation of a U.S. "presence" than either troops or gold.

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